

Testimony
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Bureau of African Affairs
U.S. Department of State
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“Update on the Evolving Security Situation in the Democratic Republic of the
Congo and Implications for U.S. National Security”
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Chairman McKeon, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the invitation to testify today on the crisis unfolding in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, or DRC, and our comprehensive response.

As you know, the security and humanitarian situation in the DRC is the most volatile in Africa today. An estimated five million people have died in the years since the second regional war began in 1998, and millions more have been affected and forced to flee their homes. The people of North and South Kivu provinces in particular have faced repeated cycles of conflict, atrocities, and displacement, with the current crisis simply being the latest iteration.

We are committed to helping the DRC and its neighbors resolve not only this current crisis, but the longer-term sources of instability in the region as well, so that we do not find ourselves back here in three years, facing yet another cycle of violence in the DRC. Among other things, we are helping to mobilize an effective humanitarian response. We are also engaging with the highest levels of the DRC, Rwandan, and Ugandan governments to urge them to continue honest and transparent dialogue and find a durable political resolution to the underlying causes of instability. We have been steadfast in our condemnation of all external support to the M23. We have also supported the involvement of the UN Security Council, the UN Secretariat, and the UN peacekeeping mission in the DRC in responding to the humanitarian and security crises. In addition, we are urging the DRC government to accelerate its efforts to professionalize and reform the Congolese army, recognizing that the responsibility of security in the DRC rests first and foremost with the government.

The rapid fall of Goma last month to the M23 rebel group provided a stark reminder that, even as the international community has made major investments in humanitarian aid, development, security sector reform, and peacekeeping, the root causes of the entrenched instability and recurring conflicts in the DRC remain

unresolved. The Congolese government continues to suffer from weak state and security institutions and has failed to provide effective security, governance, and services across its territory, including in North and South Kivu, in part due to the systemic disruption of violent armed groups and external support for such groups. Political and military tensions persist between the DRC and its eastern neighbors, particularly Rwanda. The current crisis in particular has been fueled and exacerbated by Rwanda's interference in the DRC.

The M23 is one of the most lethal armed groups operating in eastern DRC. Most of its officers were at one time members of the National Congress for the Defense of the People, or CNDP, and nominally integrated into the Congolese army, a concession they extracted after nearly capturing Goma as part of a precursor insurgency in 2008. Once integrated, these officers operated in a parallel chain of command and enjoyed impunity for their human rights abuses and illegal exploitation of the country's mineral wealth. When the Congolese government appeared poised earlier this year to challenge these arrangements, several of these officers mutinied and reconstituted themselves under a new name, the M23. The commanders of the M23 represent a "who's who" of notorious human rights abusers in the eastern DRC, including Bosco Ntaganda, who faces an International Criminal Court arrest warrant for sexual violence, the recruitment of child soldiers and other crimes against humanity.

The M23 would not be the threat it is today and would not have had the military success it has experienced without external support. There is a credible body of evidence that corroborates key findings of the UN Group of Experts' reports – including evidence of significant military and logistical support, as well as operational and political guidance, from the Rwandan government to the M23 from the early stages of this most recent conflict. While there is evidence of individuals from Uganda providing support to the M23, we do not have a body of evidence suggesting that Uganda has a government policy of supporting the M23. Nonetheless, we continue to urge the government of Uganda to ensure that supplies to the M23 do not originate in or transit through Ugandan territory, including from individual officials that may be acting on their own. We have not limited our response to diplomacy alone. As required by Section 7043(a) of the FY 2012 Appropriations Act, the Secretary suspended Foreign Military Financing, or FMF, to Rwanda in FY 2012 because of its support to the M23. The Department continues to closely monitor reports of external support, and we will continue to respond appropriately, including by reviewing our assistance, to deter this support as the situation develops.

After M23 attacked and captured Goma, the DRC government agreed last month to meet with the M23 in Kampala and hear its grievances related to the March 2009 agreement. The government has rightfully made clear its refusal to hear those claims by the M23 that undermine state authority, threaten the territorial integrity of the DRC, or go against the DRC Constitution. While parties have yet to begin substantive talks, the current ceasefire is holding and the parties continue to express commitment to dialogue. We are concerned, however, by reports that M23 maintains a significant presence within the 20-km buffer zone around Goma in defiance of the November 21 and 24 agreements by the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, or ICGLR, and about the reports that the M23 may be increasing its presence in the area. Such moves exacerbate instability and, should the conflict resume, will put at risk thousands of highly vulnerable individuals in the vicinity of Goma who were displaced by the recent violence. We call on the signatories of the November 24 agreement to ensure the full implementation of the agreement. All parties must refrain from provocative acts and respect the current ceasefire.

The highest levels of the U.S. government are committed to helping the DRC and the region achieve a sustainable peace. President Obama spoke yesterday with President Kagame and underscored that any support to M23 is inconsistent with Rwanda's desire for stability and peace. President Obama emphasized to President Kagame the importance of permanently ending all support to armed groups in the DRC, abiding by the recent commitments he made in Kampala along with Presidents Kabila and Museveni, and reaching a transparent and credible political agreement that includes an end to impunity for M23 commanders and others who have committed serious human rights abuses. President Obama believes that from this crisis should emerge a political agreement that addresses the underlying regional security, economic, and governance issues while upholding the DRC's sovereignty and territorial integrity. President Obama has also delivered the message to President Kabila that the DRC must take concrete steps toward security sector reform and improved governance in order to reach a lasting peace in eastern DRC.

In addition to the President's engagement, we have actively engaged with regional leaders and key stakeholders throughout this crisis. Secretary Clinton, Ambassador Rice, and Under Secretary Sherman have spoken or met with senior Congolese, Rwandan, Ugandan, and UN officials to advocate for a rapid and peaceful resolution to this crisis. I traveled to the DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda last month with my British and French counterparts to deliver a clear and common message that these three governments must work together to stop the crisis and

work toward a sustainable resolution of underlying issues. We stressed that, while the DRC government has agreed to hear the political grievances of the M23, we absolutely will not accept any effort to undermine the authority of the DRC government or infringe upon the country's territorial integrity. We have also been steadfast in insisting that there be no impunity for senior M23 leaders or other rebel group leaders who are under ICC indictment or international sanctions for human rights violations. Accountability is necessary to achieve a just and durable peace in the DRC. All three governments have reiterated their commitment to finding a lasting solution, but we must now see the parties take affirmative action to make this a reality.

Looking ahead, we are monitoring humanitarian needs and working to mobilize resources to ensure continued humanitarian access and assistance to civilians affected by this crisis. The humanitarian situation in the eastern Congo remains deplorable, with more than two million Congolese currently displaced internally or to neighboring countries. Over 700,000 people have been displaced during this year alone, many of them displaced for a second or third time. The United States provided more than \$110 million in humanitarian assistance for Congolese refugees, internally displaced persons, and conflict-affected civilians in Fiscal Year 2012.

We also believe that direct dialogue between Presidents Kabila, Kagame, and Museveni is paramount to resolving not only the immediate crisis, but also the underlying causes of instability in the region. Even while the talks between M23 and the DRC government continue, there are root causes of conflict that can only be addressed through direct dialogue between governments, including issues of land tenure, refugee flows, the illegal exploitation of natural resources, economic and border security, and support networks for armed groups. In addition, government cooperation will drive the success, or failure, of economic integration and its potential contribution to regional stability and development.

While the responsibility to implement change rests with these governments, we encourage the UN Secretary-General to appoint a high-level UN Special Envoy to engage with these governments on the ground and on a sustained basis. We want such a high-level Special Envoy to be dedicated to helping to coordinate with the government stakeholders to reach a durable political resolution and ensure the implementation of that resolution over the long-term. Even the most optimistic among us recognize that lasting stability in the Great Lakes region is a long-term goal that will require patience, perseverance, and political will. We will work with our partners and the proposed UN Special Envoy to ensure that any agreement

between the regional governments is transparent, sustainable, inclusive, and enjoys the support and commitment of the region, including Congolese civil society and civilian communities.

Throughout this peace building process, civilian protection is and must remain a priority. This includes substantial efforts by the DRC government on security sector reform, or SSR, which I will address shortly. But first, I want to address the mandate and current efforts of the UN peacekeeping mission currently in the DRC, MONUSCO, which has come under heavy scrutiny in recent weeks. MONUSCO has endeavored to protect civilians under difficult circumstances since the onslaught of this current crisis last spring, often serving as the only buffer between the M23 and civilian populations. We commend the brave service of the peacekeepers from several dozen countries who are operating in very difficult, often dangerous conditions. No matter MONUSCO's mandate or resources, no peacekeeping mission is intended to take the place of a national army in the middle of an armed crisis. We must remain realistic about what MONUSCO can be expected to achieve with its mandate and resources and across a country the size of Western Europe.

We agree that more must be done to protect civilians in the eastern DRC, and that includes working with the UN and MONUSCO, as well as with the DRC government, which has the primary responsibility for protecting its territory and all of its citizens. The United Nations has had a peacekeeping presence in the DRC since 1999. We have supported that presence as it has helped to avert regional war, support critical electoral processes, and deter human rights abuses. Yet UN peacekeeping efforts have struggled to fulfill their longer-term goal of stabilizing the eastern DRC because of the continued weakness of their Congolese counterparts and continued meddling from the outside.

We and our fellow UN Security Council members and troop contributing countries are reviewing options for improving the UN's ability to protect civilians and helping to implement defined aspects of a potential regional political settlement. There are multiple proposals on the table for how to boost MONUSCO's capacity against armed groups. We are closely following the ICGLR proposal to develop an effective neutral and regional fighting force in the Kivus and the Southern African Development Community's proposal to possibly alter the mandate for the South African contingent in MONUSCO and move it to North Kivu.

We support regional efforts to find a peaceful and enduring political solution to the threat posed by the M23 and other armed groups. We strongly encourage countries to coordinate with MONUSCO and the UN, particularly with regard to command-and-control, resourcing, and mandate, in order to avoid undermining current security efforts. Any new force or additional troops will take time to deploy. In the meantime, we continue to encourage MONUSCO to robustly implement its current mandate.

I want now to draw specific attention to the critical need for comprehensive and sustained security sector reform, or SSR, in the DRC. As I noted earlier, the DRC government has the primary responsibility for protecting its territory and all its citizens. The crisis over the past few months has revealed the endemic weaknesses of the DRC national army, or FARDC, and has demonstrated to devastating effect the critical need for a professional and capable DRC army that can protect the country's citizens. While the FARDC experienced initial success in resisting the M23 in the early months of the offensive, the army rapidly lost ground to the M23 once the rebels started receiving outside support. The DRC military's perennially problematic leadership and command and control, logistical deficiencies, and poor military planning have also made the army far less effective. The recent reports of rapes and other abuses committed by army forces in Minova show that indiscipline and impunity persist.

We have been working with the DRC government for some time now on SSR. Our assistance has included the training of a light-infantry battalion, training to army officers and support to the armed forces' military justice capacities. However, much, much more must be done. We are urging President Kabila to undertake a credible and sustained effort to professionalize and reform the Congolese security forces. In a positive move, the Congolese government recently signed a Child Soldiers Action Plan with the United Nations, which we advocated over several months. This is one step but broader reform will take time, and the Congolese government needs to demonstrate the political will and commitment to achieving SSR, particularly after recent years of dismal progress and few signs of sustained political will. Demonstrable commitment includes taking clear and bold measures to ensure that Congolese soldiers are professionally trained, adequately paid and supported, and respectful of international human rights norms.

SSR goes beyond the military. The DRC government must also work to build up its judicial infrastructure and other security apparatuses, including prisons. We will also work to ensure that civil society has a greater input in assessing the

functions and overseeing the performance of the FARDC and Congolese National Police.

As part of SSR, we are also pressing the DRC government to assertively address impunity, which is rampant in all ranks of the military and across all security services, and undercuts the civilian population's trust in these security forces. The government needs to hold human rights abusers accountable by arresting and prosecuting them, regardless of their military rank. We will continue to speak out against the forcible recruitment of children, acts of sexual violence, and targeted attacks against civilians, whether committed by armed groups or the government forces.

Along with military reform, we are making clear that the Congolese government must accelerate its efforts to deploy and strengthen state institutions and provide needed public services to all Congolese citizens in the Kivus. The governance vacuum that exists in parts of the country has allowed armed groups to set up parallel civil administrations, including taxing the population and exploiting border crossings and the Congo's mineral rich resources. We are assisting the DRC government to better provide much-needed public services, including those focused on responding to and preventing sexual violence. We are training select security forces on how to address gender-based violence crimes and assisting the Congolese military justice system in their efforts to better investigate and prosecute cases of conflict-related sexual violence.

The expansion of governance across the country must include electoral reform, as well as the holding of long-delayed provincial and local elections. This extension of effective governance, combined with legitimate provincial elections, is necessary for a lasting peace. There are a plethora of drivers behind the instability in the DRC, but we must not lose sight of the DRC government's own responsibilities to reform and build up its security forces and deliver effective governance to all corners of its territory.

We believe that the time has come for the region's leaders and the international community to permanently break the cycle of violence and impunity in the region. The blame for this cycle of violence cannot be cast upon any one entity; similarly, the solution lies not in an individual country or president, but in the combined and cooperative efforts of the region. We all have a moral, humanitarian, and security imperative to help build a future for the Congolese people who have seen more conflict than peace over the last two decades. Such a future must be rooted in strong and credible institutions, the transparent and

legitimate use of the DRC's vast mineral wealth for transparent economic development, and respect for human rights. The people of the DRC share this responsibility with us. The current instability in the DRC did not arrive overnight and similarly it will not be repaired quickly.

We need to build on recent signs of progress, many of which have been gravely set back by the M23 rebellion and the violence committed by other armed groups. The decisions taken now will set the trajectory of the next several years. The M23 and its supporters are waiting to see if their strategy of destabilization will win them what they want. Other abusive militias in the Kivus are similarly watching to see if violent behavior is an effective path to power and influence. And the world is watching to see whether the eastern DRC can transcend its history as a theater for proxy conflict and finally advance towards the peace and prosperity owed to its people and promised by its natural wealth and diversity. We are working diligently with our Congolese and international partners to ensure that armed groups are turned back, outside support ceases, and peace carries the day.

Today's crisis is a tragedy, but it also offers a real opportunity to help the Congolese people and the broader region set a more sustainable course toward peace. We urge the international community, the Great Lakes region, and the Congolese people to demonstrate the resolve to see this process through to the peace that we know lays ahead for the Congo.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to answering your questions.